

garet growing, rebelling, marrying, travelling, beginning her writing career, and finally coming back with her two young children to care for her "Mum" when she, now living with Aunt Ruby in Victoria, is dealing gallantly with terminal cancer.

Part 4, "Elsie Frye Laurence," commemorates Jack's mother, a writer of fiction herself and always an encouraging influence on Margaret's work. Her first novel, submitted to an English publisher while she was working as a governess in Moscow, was published without her knowledge in 1916, at a time when she had returned to England but was in the throes of emigrating to Canada with her mother and sister. When Margaret and Jack separated in 1962, she was virtually the only one on either side of the family who supported Margaret in her decision — she understood the agonizing triple demands of mother, wife and writer, and had herself contemplated leaving her husband in order to follow her writing vocation. Small wonder that Margaret's gratitude was everlasting, or that her memory inspires a digression on Virginia Woolf and a comparison that comes down staunchly in Elsie Frye Laurence's favour: "Woolf's novels, so immaculate and fastidious in the use of words, are also immaculate and fastidious in ways that most people's lives are not... Elsie was in fact a pioneer in the area of Canadian women's writing, in the area of women writers' needs, although I don't think she ever realized quite the effect her efforts had on the generations to come."

In Part 5, one third of the entire book in length, Margaret gives us her memoir of herself. In an anecdotal, always honest, often funny series of vignettes of her life and times from the birth of her children onwards, we are invited to share in the making of Margaret Laurence, writer and activist. The young girl who had hidden away in the disused stable-loft to write her stories, who had felt so disadvantaged in being female that her first poems were submitted to United College's *Manitoban* under the pseudonym "Steve Lancaster," gradually became the woman whose vocation was so strong that she had to follow it, alone: "Loneliness was an almost constant part of my life, but I had always been a lonely person. The presence of my children meant that, in the deepest sense, loneliness could never be a real threat." There is no self-pity in her ru-

minations, and there is always honesty: "I should add, with gratitude, that in the early years of my children's lives, I didn't have to earn a living. Young mothers today may share parenting more fully, but they also have to contribute to the family income."

The darkness and the light were always very close for Margaret. Laughter and joy came easily to her, but so did acute pain, for her friends as readily as for herself. Her houses gave her much joy, first Elmcot, and she tells something of its development into a wayside inn for travelling Canadians, young and old, then "the Shack" on the Otonabee, and finally the Lakefield house, decorated to her heart's desire and settled into in 1974, and thereafter a focus for her life's varied activities. But she could not rise above and never recovered from the damage that the book-banners did her, though she pays tribute to the wonderful support that was forthcoming each time from hundreds of unknown correspondents as well as from her dear friends. Her last decade was a time of ever increasing activism in the many causes that demanded and received her support, and her memoirs ring, finally, with a statement of faith in the spirit of men and women everywhere that infuses all of her writing.

"Afterwords," the final section, is a kind of scrapbook of poetry that she loved to write for her friends and family on special occasions, but never thought of publishing, and articles that she thought were particularly apt to her central concerns. These pieces she picked with great care, and this part of her memoir was very dear to her as she told me many times. Individually they shine with her intensity of love and conviction; collectively they are a fitting coda to the exceptional life of a woman who had passionate convictions and the courage to live their meaning:

*Life has become so dangerous and so complex that it frightens me to know a few fallible, and indeed often ignorant and unimaginative, so-called leaders have it in their power to blow us all to bits.*

*We do have to keep on, in every way we can, saying, "This must not happen." ... The struggle is not lost. I believe we have to live, as long as we live, in the expectation and hope of changing the world for the better.... And, with all our doubts, with all our flaws, with all our problems, I believe that we will carry on, with God's help.*

## THE WOMAN AND THE LYRE: Woman Writers in Classical Greece and Rome

Jane McIntosh Snyder. Carbondale and Edwardsville, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989

*Johanna H. Stuckey*

Ever since the invention of writing around 3000 B.C.E. in ancient Sumer, there must have been women authors. As some scholars suggest, writing may have been invented by a priestess (or priestesses) in a Mesopotamian temple complex. Certainly the Mesopotamian patron of writing was Goddess Nidaba, the scribe of the divine world. And what seems to be the earliest poem ever recorded is a hymn to Goddess Inanna, the work of Enheduanna, a Mesopotamian high priestess. Unfortunately, most female voices from ancient times seem irretrievably lost to us, partly because of the hazards of text transmission and the general depredations of time, but also, as Jane McIntosh Snyder points out, because of "the kinds of prejudicial attitudes to which women writers of any time or place have usually been subjected."

In the *Woman and the Lyre* Snyder pulls together all that we now know about twenty women writers from ancient Greece and Rome. She makes clear that, although we know of others (and there must have been many more), "some cannot really be evaluated because so little of their work has survived." Even the twenty she discusses, Sappho included, are represented at best by "a small portion of what [they] actually wrote" and at worst by nothing but "a reported title or two."

Of the book's six chapters, the first is devoted to Sappho of Lesbos and the second to women poets of fifth-century Greece — Myrtis, Korinna, Praxilla, and Telesilla. The third discusses female poets of Hellenistic Greece — Anyte, Nossis, Moero, and Erinna. The author devotes one chapter to women philosophers of Hellenistic and Roman times — women like Leontion, Hipparchia, Theano, and the great Hypatia — a meagre remainder of sixty-five whose names are known. Another chapter examines women writers in Rome and their successors under Christianity. A concluding chapter treats recurring themes and topics and shows

that these women wrote differently about topics different from those that interested their male counterparts. Snyder provides mainly her own translations of the writings, which she then discusses in detail. Thus the book becomes an invaluable compendium of women's writing in Classical Greece and Rome. Copious notes, an excellent bibliography, and a useful index complete this readable volume.

It is, however, shocking for us to realize that inside these covers is amassed practically all that it is possible for us to know about women's contribution to the writing of that highly creative thousand years or so between the late seventh century B.C.E. (B.C.) and the fifth century C.E. (A.D.). That so little remains seems cause for anger. Classical scholar Snyder points out, however, how truly "astonishing" it is that we know so much:

*Far from having only one woman writer of antiquity — Sappho — as we might be led to believe by a typical modern account, we possess tangible evidence of several handfuls of women authors whose voices can still be heard or of whom there is at least some report.*

After reading her book, we tend to agree, for the forces militating against the survival from the Classical period of any women's writing were enormous — among them, the assumption of female inferiority, the trivializing of women's endeavours, the devaluation of women's writing by insulting the writers, and, in general, the refusal to take seriously what women were saying.

In her concluding chapter, Jane McIntosh Snyder hopes that her book will lessen "the sense of mutedness by pointing the way towards the origins of the tradition of women writers in the West." Indeed, she has done so, with scholarly integrity, in clear and readable language, and with a feminist consciousness. Her book is a welcome addition to the growing feminist reconstruction of women's past.

## WOMAN AS MEDIATRIX: Essays on Nineteenth-Century European Women Writers

Avriel H. Goldberger, ed. Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1987

**Deborah Heller**

The fourteen chapters that constitute this rich and varied collection are drawn from

a Conference on Nineteenth-Century Women Writers held in 1980 at Hofstra University. Envisioned as a companion volume to *Nineteenth-Century Women Writers of the English-Speaking World* (Greenwood Press, 1986), this book concentrates on European (French, German, Swedish, Russian) woman writers, treating English-speaking ones only in three papers that deal with cross-cultural themes: Mary Wollstonecraft is introduced briefly in the opening essay as the pivotal figure who paved the way for women in the nineteenth century to engage in the writing of social commentary and criticism, a phenomenon then explored more fully in the work of the German Bettina Brentanovon Arnim and the French Flora Tristan (Marie-Claire Hoock-Demarle, "The Nineteenth Century: Insights of Contemporary Women Writers"); the English Frances Trollope is studied as a critic of George Sand (Marie-Jacques Hoog, "Trollope's Choice"), and the life and work of the American Margaret Fuller are examined in the light of the influence of Mme de Staël's fictional heroine, Corinne (Paula Blanchard, "Corinne and the 'Yankee Corinna'"). Staël and Sand, it may be observed, under one aspect or another, account for half of the essays in the collection (three on Staël, four on Sand), perhaps reflecting the fact that, among the writers discussed, only they, along with Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, are still read today for their "literary" value.

This difference among the subjects of the essays probably also accounts for the fact that while the essays on Staël, Sand and Droste are all on particularized topics (e.g. Alex Szogi's study of the influence of Sand's *Une Conspiration en 1537* on Musset's *Lorenzaccio*, or Maruta Letina-Ray's discussion of gender bias in the typically condescending German critical approach to Droste's "Die Judenbuch"), the others tend to be of the more general, introductory, 'Life, Times and Works' variety. Among the latter type are "Fredrika Bremer: Sweden's First Feminist" by Doris R. Asmundsson; "An Introduction to the Life and Times of Louis Otto" by Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres; "Toward a New Freedom: Rahel Varnhagen and the German Women Writers before 1848" by Doris Starr Guilloton; "A *Nigilistka* and a *Communarde*: Two Voices of the

Nineteenth-Century Russian *Intelligentska*"; a study of the Russian sisters, Anna Jaclard and Sofia Kovalevskaia, by Isabelle Naginski; and "Juliette Adam: She Devil or *Grande Française*?" by Jean Scammon Hyland and Daniel H. Thomas. This group of essays (whose titles suggest the abundance and variety of material covered) delineate the circumstances surrounding these women writers' articulate espousal of women's rights and other social issues, thus helping to illuminate the social and intellectual context from which the more lasting, "literary" achievements of a George Eliot or a George Sand emerged.

By contrast, the treatments of the more "canonical" authors focus sharply on quite specific subjects. While all are illuminating, I was particularly engaged by Julia Frey's discussion of George Sand and the puppet theatre at her estate at Nohant ("George Sand and the Seamless Theatre") and Madelyn Gutwirth's "Woman as Mediatrix: From Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Germaine de Staël." The Frey essay gives a fascinating account of the ideal "counter-community" Sand established for herself, her family and her guests at Nohant, while Gutwirth explores the seminal role of Rousseau's Julie (from *La Nouvelle Héloïse*) in the creation of literary and extra-literary female ideals and the ways in which Staël's Corinne can be viewed as re-scripting — both subverting and extending — Rousseau's model. Gutwirth's essay, incidentally, is the only one directly to discuss the position of woman as "mediatrix." The editor's decision to extrapolate her phrase as a unifying title to link the various essays in this collection may create false expectations. For despite the title — and the valiant effort of Germaine Brée's "Introduction" to superimpose on the essays a unity not present in the original conference (she suggests it can be found in nineteenth-century women's shared experience of the Industrial Revolution) — the essays remain irreducibly heterogeneous in their aims and scope. And why should it be otherwise? Any attempt to flatten out the rich diversity of this collection must end by implying that some essays are peripheral and others more central to a hypothetical norm. Instead, it is the very differences among the essays that make this collection such a lively one.